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AMATA



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From the German of Richard Voss

BY

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AMATA

CHAPTER I

I was a very young man when I had an experience, upon which I cannot look back to-day, even after all these years, without deep agitation. If in this narration I set down anything which a healthy mind will reject as the mere feverish phantasies of a sick man, I must accept this opinion of the cool and intelligent reader, without even attempting an explanation.

As I said, I was still very young, and at that time lived in Rome, where from the very nature of the place, I avoided mankind, and enjoyed Rome in my own fashion. I used to stroll through the city alone; I used to wander about over the Campagna alone; always alone, whether on foot or on horseback, or in

one of the native carts, drawn by a lively little horse.

At that time it was still the Rome of Pius IX, and widely different from the present-day capital of United Italy—the modern Rome—this monument of the greatest vandalism, erected by the very nation that feels itself historically justified in despising vandalism. In Rome, as Goethe and Ferdinand Gregorvius first saw it, nothing had been disturbed, no part destroyed. Everything was just as it had been in the good old times. The Pope still went in triumphal procession from the Quirinal to the Vatican; the carriages of the cardinals still rattled through the streets; these streets still swarmed with processions; the heavy, deadening atmosphere of the Church still hung over the city; and the spirit of mysticism of the dark ages stalked about in broad daylight upon the beautiful plaza, where stood a column erected to the Holy Virgin.

I saw the Pope celebrate the mass in St. Peter's, and—but one must have seen it to appreciate it! I heard the choir sing in the Sistine Chapel, and felt a thrill of mysterious awe. And then what contrasts there were—contrasts to be found no where in the wide world but in Rome: Michael Angelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's; the *Apollo* in the Belvedere Gallery of the Vatican; the frescoes of Pinturicchio in the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo; the *Venus* in the Capitol; the catacombs of the first Christians, and the Pantheon.

When wearied in mind and body by the churches, I would find rest and refreshment on the forum and the Palatine; in the ruins of the Colosseum; and by the baths of Caracalla, then beautiful wildernesses, in whose thickets darting swallows made their nests. My heart fled from the darkness of Christian legend into the sunlit splendor of antiquity. With soul still pierced by the sound of

the death-rattle of the followers of Christ, who laid down their lives for their belief, I listened to the "Evoe" of the priests of Bacchus, and the joyful shouts of the Roman multitude, drunk with the joy of existence.

In such an incessant variation of passionate moods I found myself, when the events occurred which I wish to relate—be it understood, only to relate, not to explain.

CHAPTER II

One Sunday I rode over to Frascati. Even early in the morning it had been sultry, and while I was taking my siesta at Tusculum, in the ruins of the villa of Tiberius, I noticed a huge gray bank of clouds piling up over the sea to the southward. The sirocco !

I dislike nothing more than the south wind. The air of the desert, the scorching breath which floats over to the rocky pyramids of the Alps, makes me ill, feverishly ill. It enervates me. The clouds had hardly begun to mount up into the glorious sky before I realized the presence of the sirocco. My limbs grew heavy, and my head began to ache. As far as I was concerned the day was spoiled.

In the meantime I knew of nothing better to do than to lie still, and let my horse wander about under the scanty

shade of a lilac tree, and find, if possible, among the parched ferns some meagre remnants of tough grass. Soon, however, the sirocco lifted up its hoarse voice, which always had an uncanny sound in my ears. It sighed, moaned, groaned. It whiningly whispered to me of the hosts which the simoon over there in Africa had buried in the red sand of the desert.

I got up at last in a bad humor, and tried to catch my horse, which was grazing free. It had never been hard to do this before ; but to-day he seemed to be possessed by the evil spirit of the south wind. I tried for a long time, and with much trouble, and it was finally only by means of a trick that I caught him. Apparently the animal must have found but poor pasture, for he was stubborn and unruly, traits which he had never shown before. All this did not tend to improve my bad humor.

I had planned to return by way of

Marino, and there feed my horse. But when I arrived, the ugly and dirty birth-place of the noble Vittoria Colonna appeared to be such a distasteful refuge, even from the ever growing sirocco, that I rode on farther. Down a steep ravine I went, through which trickled a tiny brook ; then by bad roads through deep-shadowed olive woods, along beside Colonna, and thence to the New Appian Way.

I stopped at the inn " Mezzavia," to give my hungry animal some meal soaked in water. When that had been attended to, I strolled into the tavern, a dismal, inhospitable place, reeking of rancid oil and stale fish. I ordered some wine and eggs, and then, in spite of the sirocco, sat down in front of the house at the edge of the Appian Way.

Before me the wilderness stretched away as far as the eye could reach. Over the bare and treeless brown plain crept the light-colored vapor of the south

wind, making the landscape seem even more desolate. From the point where I was sitting I could see no other sign of human civilization but ruins. They were the half-destroyed tombs on the Old Appian Way, which, crossing the Campagna a short distance from me, stretched off toward the Alban Hills, now veiled in the brownish mist.

It had grown late. The sirocco had overspread the whole sky. The brilliant southern sun had been obliterated. A grayish twilight reigned; and this, in company with the howling of the wind, produced an effect that was almost ghostly. It looked as if I were to have a gloomy ride home, for my horse was too tired to allow me to think of starting before evening. But I was used to such nocturnal rides, and feared neither bandits nor malaria. If I feared anything at all it was the great shepherd dogs, five of which had once attacked me, howling dismally and had almost torn the clothes from my body.

The landscape lay as if dead in the grayish twilight. Even the sharp jangle of the bells upon the high-wheeled Campagna carts—the sound so well known upon all Roman highways of commerce—could not be heard above the roaring of the wind. Now and then a shepherd dog would howl somewhere off in the distance; and once a horseman shot past, his black felt hat pulled down over his eyes, and his black coat streaming far out over his horse's back.

I had only seen three persons about the inn: the landlord, his wife, and a young fellow, apparently the servant. The proprietor was an elderly man, whose clothes hung in rags upon his body. The beast-like expression of his ugly features, and his peculiar, sneaking manner struck me at first sight. He answered my polite greeting with a surly growl. Evidently he was a bad sort of man, and one of whom a lonely traveler would do well to beware.

How did such an old rascal come to have such a wife? She was young, and her slender figure was beautifully proportioned. Her delicately molded face was deathly pale, and out of it her great black eyes looked with a dull, hopeless, despairing expression. She seemed ready to drop with exhaustion, and moved as slowly and feebly as an old woman. By her costume, she was not a native of that part of Italy. The red of her bodice was faded, and her dress was very poor; but her kerchief was arranged with a certain care upon her head, and her blue-black hair, parted far down upon her forehead, gave the pale face a likeness to the Madonna. The servant appeared to be from the same locality as his mistress. He was very young, and of that type which is so often seen on the Spanish Plaza in Rome. The moment that I looked at the two young people the thought flashed upon me: "They are in love with each other; they must be in

love with each other. I hope that they are on their guard before the landlord."

The woman brought me my boiled eggs, stale bread as hard as a rock, and some wine. I spoke to her:

"You don't come from this neighborhood, I see?"

"No."

"From Sorra, I suppose?"

"Yes; from Sorra."

"The landlord is your husband, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Have you any children?"

"No; no children."

There was a silence. She leaned against the table near me, as if to support herself. Apparently she wanted to go, but still remained standing there, as if too tired to make a single movement. She shuddered feverishly.

"You are ill," I said.

"Yes."

"Have you had the fever long?"

“ Yes ; for a long time.”

“ Haven’t you taken any quinine ? ”

“ Why ? ”

“ To cure the fever.”

“ I don’t want to cure it.”

Her voice had an absolutely deadened, hopeless tone, and the ghostly expression never for an instant left her glorious black eyes. Now I noticed for the first time how young she was—the poor, innocent child !

“ You are still very young, are you not ? ”

“ Eighteen.”

“ You must have just been married ? ”

“ Three years.”

“ How did it happen that you married a Roman ? ”

“ It just happened.”

“ Poor child ! ”

Just then a hoarse voice cried from the house :

“ Heigh there, Assunta ! ”

She did not appear to hear. A feel-

ing of anxiety came over me that I could not explain. I suddenly wished that I had not spoken to her. "Your husband is calling you," I said.

"O, my husband," she repeated, with that awful dead look in her eyes, and the dull, expressionless tone in her voice. I reminded her again :

"You ought to go in."

"I am going." But she stood still.

"I suppose your husband met you in Rome, did he not? But there, you had better go into the house now."

"He found me on the highway in front of his house."

"Found you?"

"I was on my way to Rome to look for work. I was ill and hungry. I fainted in front of his house, and he found me."

"Then he married you?"

"Then he married me. It would have been better if he had let me die."

Again the call came. This time in a voice choking with rage. But she did not stir.

The young fellow now appeared in the doorway, and gazed over toward the delicate, slender figure leaning against the table near me. I shall never forget the look in his eyes as he gazed upon her. I urged her again :

“ You must go.”

But she repeated, as if she had not heard me :

“ And then he married me ; but it would have been better—Oh, so much better—if he had let me die.”

It was not a complaint ; it was something more terrible ; it was utter hopelessness—despair.

The young man came up to the table, and said in an undertone :

“ Go in, or he will strike you again ; and if he strikes you——”

The woman shuddered convulsively, then, with a sigh that was almost a groan, turned and went towards the door with listless, dragging steps.

I spoke to the boy, but he turned his

back on me, and stared after the girl. I repeated my question :

“Are you not a countryman of the mistress of the inn ? ”

In place of an answer, I heard him murmur ;

“And if he strikes her again——”

“Are you from Sorra, too ? How did you happen to come to this tavern ? ”

“ I’m sure he will strike her again.”

“ Listen to me ! ”

He paid no attention, but continued to stand with his back to me, so that I could not see his face. The sound of a struggle came from the interior of the house. The blood rushed to my head, as if I had suddenly gulped down a whole bottle of strong, red Genzano wine. I sprang to my feet, and went up to the fellow. The dull sound of a blow came from the house, then a half-choked groan, and then——

I saw him clutch at his belt with quivering hands ; saw him tear something

from it. I tried to seize him, to hold him back, but he broke loose, and rushed into the house. Before I could catch him again it was all over. He had stabbed the innkeeper to death.

CHAPTER III

More terrible than the sight of the dead man, weltering in his blood, was the bearing of the murderer and the young wife. They made no sound, but stood near the corpse, and gazed into each other's eyes. The blood had spurted over the girl, and even her face was reddened by it ; but she did not seem to care at all. It was as if the murder had been fated ; as if they were now perfectly satisfied that it had at last been accomplished.

Neither did it occur to me to blame the man for the murder ; to overwhelm him with reproaches ; to threaten him with imprisonment. I was only conscious of one thought, and that was how the two could get away, how they could save themselves.

I snatched from my pocket all the money that I had with me, and held it

out to the unfortunate man. When he made no movement to accept it, I stuck it in his pocket for him, without his appearing to notice what I did. Then I cried, frightened at the sound of my own voice :

“Away ! You must get away ! Into the forest ! Some one may come at any moment, and then you will be lost !”

They stood still gazing at each other. I rushed to the door, looked up and down the road. No one was to be seen, not a sound was to be heard. Thank God ! Then I rushed back, and whispered to them, as if the pursuers were close at hand :

“Fly ! fly ! fly !” But they did not seem to have any realization of their terrible danger. They still stood and gazed into each other’s eyes. At last I found the right word.

“Do you want them to find Assunta by the dead man ; to arrest her, and

throw her into prison with you?" That brought the man, at least, to his senses.

I gathered together for them whatever I could readily find : some bread, lard, a flask of wine, and a cloth. Full of deadly anxiety for their safety, I remained talking with them, and urging them on, until they left the house. He carried the bundle, and held her hand. She still walked with dragging, listless steps, and had the same hopeless, despairing look in her eyes. During the whole time they had not uttered a sound.

In the deathlike twilight of the sirocco, I saw the two slender figures pass over the desolate brown plain, toward the street of tombs, slowly, very slowly ; and yet they were leaving behind them a bloody corpse.



CHAPTER IV

Even to-day, I cannot tell how I got out of the house. I found myself seated upon my horse, shaking with terror, and driving the spurs into his flanks again and again to urge him to a more furious gallop. I fled from the place as if I had been the murderer pursued by the police ; nay, rather as if I had been pursued by furies. Suddenly I uttered a shriek, so loud, so piercing, that my horse reared. Blood ! There was blood on my hands, blood on my arms, my whole body ! Blood on the body of my horse ! Blood on the road ! Blood flowing in a broad stream through the lonely fields ! Blood on the ruins of the aqueduct near me ! Blood on the tombs of the Old Appian Way ! Blood, red, running blood smeared over the clouded sky ! A glowing lake of blood ahead of me, where I knew that the sea lay !

My imagination was so fevered, my mind so turned by the events of the day, that it took me some time to comprehend the phenomenon of the universal blood-red light. It was the dying glory of the sun as it set behind the thick haze of the sirocco.

The sun disappeared, the wild light faded from about me; but the whole western horizon remained marked with the sickening color. It was deep night before the blood-red stripe disappeared from the black horizon.

The storm ceased at sunset. The coming of the deep stillness was so sudden, and was such a contrast to the tumult of the atmosphere that had gone before, that it had an uncanny effect upon my shaken nerves. The sultriness increased, until I felt as if I were breathing some choking vapor. I pulled off my hat, tore open my waistcoat and my shirt, and rode on with bare breast, and still without feeling the least relief.

I began to be oppressed by the frightful calm of nature, as by the presence of a corpse. I held my breath and listened to every murmur ; to the hoof beats of my horse ; to the baying of a watchful dog by some distant shepherd's hut ; to the mournful hooting of an owl in its nest in the ruins of some demolished aqueduct or tomb. Then suddenly I thought I heard the tramp of horses upon the road. The sound came from the direction of the house in which the lonely dead man lay. The sound approached rapidly, and seemed to be made by a number of horses. They must be Carabinieri ! They had found the murdered man, and were pursuing the criminal. They would overtake me, capture me ; I should be suspected of the crime, should have to testify, tell what I knew—I must escape them !

My horse was almost exhausted, but I drove the spurs into his flanks anew, and urged him to still greater exertions. Still

he did not go fast enough, and I beat him over the head. The sound of hoofs behind me came closer and closer. In a moment they would see me, seize me!

I turned off to the right on to the plain. If I kept bearing to the right, I must soon come to the Via Tusculana, and then, following this, I could reach Rome by the Gate of San Giovanni. It would be impossible for them to pursue and capture me at night on the Campagna.

I could not, however, find the other road. The farther I went, and the more eagerly I sought, the more astray I seemed to go. My legs grew as heavy as lead, and my head ached frightfully. My mind was as stupid and confused as if I was lying in a feverish slumber, and was only dreaming of the whole fearful experience. In this condition I rode on and on. I scarcely knew that I was riding, and that I was on the open ground near Rome. The lights of the city flared up before me. A long, long band of pale

shimmering light stretched out ahead. It seemed to rise out of the ground, to pour from it like a white vapor, and to stream up to the very sky, black and starless above me. I rode toward the wan light, but could not reach it. It continually receded from me, and seemed to be unapproachable.

Something dark, massive, round, rose before me. I stopped my horse and tried to think. Was not that the tomb of Cæcilia Metella? But that was on the Old Appian Way, and to the left of the road by which I had come from Marino. And I had instead ridden to the right to escape from the Carabinieri. How, then, could that lofty monument be the tomb of Cæcilia? Impossible! And yet, and yet——. But on the other hand, what were those black blotches? And there against the pale background of the lights of Rome the outline of a tree was sharply silhouetted. That must be the Grove of Egeria, and this was the tomb of Cæcilia

Metella after all. But how had I come there?

It was strange, but then it was really of no consequence. I was no longer able to think or reason clearly. I hardly retained strength and sense enough to keep myself in the saddle.

I let my horse go wherever he would, holding the bridle but loosely. Soon I let it drop entirely. I was conscious that my horse suddenly shied at some obstacle; that I was being thrown violently from the saddle; and then I fell heavily to the ground, and knew nothing more.

CHAPTER V

I awoke to the perception of a wonderful perfume, so strange, sweet, and stupefying, that I lay motionless, with eyes shut, and inhaled the fragrance with long, deep breaths. Then I fell once more into a sort of half slumber.

I tried, with beclouded mind, to think what kind of an odor it could be. It seemed as if all the perfumes of Arabia were floating about me. It was impossible to identify it as any one. Now it was like jasmine, now like roses and narcissus, now like incense. So must have smelled the spikenard of the ancients.

At last I gave up trying to penetrate the mystery of this wondrous perfume. As I lay still, inhaling that fragrance, I felt that I was being more and more overpowered by an idea that was as new, strange, and rare to me as that aroma

itself. How can I even attempt to describe it? It seemed as if I were inhaling something unearthly, supernatural. Then I opened my eyes.

I was lying upon a bed or divan, at any rate upon something soft and warm. Where I was I could not tell. A soft light surrounded my couch. It seemed to me like a delicate pale haze, like an infinitely tender, bluish luster. As my eyes became accustomed to the light, I began to discern my surroundings.

I was in a small square room, with vaulted ceiling of white stucco work, representing leafy wreaths, masks, and beautiful human forms in motion; all of an excellence which has only been attained by one art in the world—the ancient Greek. I saw Bacchus and his train, and Cupids showering flowers as they fluttered in the air.

The walls were painted like those of a Pompeian house. Here, too, were wreaths, flowers, fruits; here, too, were

happiness, grace, and exuberance of beauty, which seemed inspired. The whole little room, filled, as it was, with that fragrance from Paradise, and glowing with that fairy light, breathed of the pleasure of existence, the joy of living, and the highest earthly bliss.

I found that I was not dressed in my clothes, but covered with a snow-white sheet, upon which my hands lay motionless. They were waxen white, like the hands of a dead person. But I could move, could even turn my head, though to do so caused a burning, piercing pain.

The floor of the room was of mosaic, but I could not make out the pattern, for it was for the most part covered with a fine light mat. My couch was in the middle of the room, so that there was a space all around me. At my right, I noticed an antique chair, and, not far from it, a small table, with a cover of some kind of yellowish cloth. On the table stood a beautiful silver vase of ancient

design, and from this vessel appeared to come the light as well as the perfume. I also saw some of those little bluish glass vials, such as are found in old Roman graves. They were tear vials, and of a strangely beautiful tint.

Where was I? How had I come here? Who had brought me into this strange room, undressed me, laid me on the bed, covered me up so carefully? What had happened to me? I tried to look back, to reflect; but I was too tired to torture my aching brain with conjectures. Besides, it was so pleasant to lie there, surrounded by the enchanted glow and the sweet perfume.

Would any one come to look after me further? And who? Doubtless the good Samaritan who had practiced his Christian charity upon me. At any rate there must be something the matter with me. I must have been ill.

How wonderful it all was! I lay, with open eyes, and awaited the entrance of

my kind friend, whoever he might be. I would ask him about everything that bothered me. Strange, I could not find a door anywhere. I sat up, gazed all around carefully. No; there was no door!

The exertion of sitting up and gazing about was too much for my weakened powers. I fell back utterly exhausted.

* * * * *

She must have come to me from the room below, through some door in the floor at the foot of my bed, softly, noiselessly, like a ghost; for suddenly she was there, close to my bed. I could only explain her appearance by supposing that she had entered by some door invisible to me. That I could account for it, so testified to the clearness of my consciousness; otherwise, I should have been forced to believe that the delicate, bright form near me was nothing but a dream.

Her face was familiar to me, and yet I could not remember whom this sweet

child-like being resembled. I knew no woman with a face so tender, so pale ; with such charming features, with such deep black eyes, so deathly sorrowful. Yes ; I saw now that it was the eyes that I had recognized.

Her dress was also strange, being of white, and of some fabric that fell in a thousand fine folds about her body. It flowed about the graceful child in shimmering, curling waves. She must be still a child in years, but why should a child look so pale, so serious, so deeply sorrowful ? What right had a child to such a fixed, impenetrable stare, as if she had seen something awful, frightful, something that had horrified her ?

I was so absorbed in gazing at my strange visitor, that I never thought of addressing her, of asking her who she was, and how I had come there. She did not notice that my eyes were open, and that I was gazing steadfastly at her, as if she were a vision from another world.

She seemed to harmonize with the wondrous fragrance, with the supernatural light, that filled the chamber. Yes ; she must be the lovely embodiment of that perfume and that light !

It was indeed strange that I did not marvel more. Everything seemed only a matter of course, and, besides, I felt that I had only lived to experience this pleasure, the pleasure of seeing her.

She left me and walked across the room ; nay, rather glided across it. How delicate, how small her feet must be ! They hardly seemed to touch the floor. I could not hear the slightest sound, not even the rustling of her garments on the fine straw of the matting. At every step, at every movement, the shimmering drape fell in new and charming folds about her slender young limbs. And every movement had a grace, a rhythm, as beautiful as that in a Grecian statue ! My thirsty eyes drank in the beauty of those lines.

I had never seen such arms, such hands! They shone like ivory, and hung with incomparable grace from beneath the folds of the long sleeves, which heightened the impressiveness of her costume, and gave it something of a sacerdotal character. On a finger of her right hand she wore a broad, gold band, with a great stone set in it. It was a ruby, that gleamed like a ray of sunlight whenever she moved her hand.

She was now standing with her back toward me, beside the little table, upon which were the silver vase and the vials. She bent her head, and I was filled with admiration for the slender neck and the mass of blue-black hair gathered together in a single knot. I saw now that a fine black veil floated about her head like a dark haze.

She took up something from the table. It was a little lamp of burnt clay of the common ancient design. A flame rose from the lamp like a burning fairy flower,

and from this came the luster, and not, as I had supposed, from the silver vase. She looked into the lamp to see if it contained enough oil, and in doing so irresistably reminded me of one of the wise virgins.

I was impatient to see her charming face again, and lay still, waiting for her to turn toward me once more. At last she did. After replacing the lamp behind the silver vase, she turned and walked toward me, with the same slow, silent, solemn step.

She at once noticed that I was awake and watching her. My eagerness to see her must have been written all too plainly in my glance, for a delicate blush just tinted her pale features, making them seem even more lovely. I spoke to her.

I no longer remember what I said, or rather painfully uttered. My only recollection of that moment is that I felt inexpressibly weary, and at the same time inexpressibly happy. But both my ex-

haustion and my happiness had something about them that was unearthly.

She did not answer, but stood still, and gazed at me with confusion and fright. Once more I stammered how grateful I was to her. Still she was silent. She could not have understood, and yet I had addressed her in my best Italian. Perhaps I had spoken too softly. But then she would have asked me what I was saying, would have come nearer to understand me better. Why had she not done this ?

I suddenly felt a passionate longing for the sound of her voice. I felt that it must be like the song of birds, only lower, infinitely softer, infinitely more melodious. But she made no movement, no sound ; only stood there, gazing at me with her great frightened eyes. Then I sat up and stretched out both my arms to her. She could not fail to understand that !

CHAPTER VI

She understood my passionate gesture, and fled. She glided to the foot of my bed, where the door in the floor must be, and then, with her terrified eyes gazing straight into mine, vanished as if she had sunk through the opening, as if the earth had swallowed her up. She was gone, and I had not heard the sound of her voice !

I think I tried to spring out of bed to see whither she had disappeared so noiselessly ; but I must have still been very weak, for I was not able to lift myself from the bed, and sank back at once into a deep, dreamless sleep.

A voice awoke me ; a dissonant, shrill, woman's voice, speaking in the hideous dialect of the Roman peasantry :

“ Who is going to pay us ? He hasn't so much as a farthing with him ! And yet he must needs lie right at our door,

and you must needs find him, and carry him into the house! Then, besides, we've got his horse to feed. It is lucky that the man himself is too sick to eat, for I'd like to know who is going to pay us? And he hasn't a farthing!"

Then a man's voice, rough, but not disagreeable, responded:

"He would have died if I had not carried him in. Would you have wanted me to let him die? Think how young he is!"

"But without a farthing!"

"He is a foreigner visiting Rome. These foreigners all have money. Of course the horse is only hired, but it's not a bad beast. If the man can afford to travel to Rome and keep a horse, he can also afford to pay us. And if he doesn't pay us, why it will be to our credit when we get to heaven."

"If he dies, we shall be mixed up with the police again. I don't want to have anything more to do with them."

"He is better already."

"Well, he's still got fever enough to kill him two or three times over. I tell you what you do. You carry him down and out onto the road to-night, and then they can find him there in the morning."

"Dead."

"Well, what's that to us? For all I care, you can let the horse go, if that will ease your conscience any."

"He is going to stay with us until he is out of danger."

"We haven't any money with which to get him quinine. Now, do you still think you want to keep him in the house?"

"Give him some more of your fever remedy. That is better than the expensive quinine."

"What sort of a man are you, anyway? One might think the stranger was your own son!"

"Whatever we do for this man will help our own son. Perhaps our son lies ill somewhere in the foreign country

where he now is. Perhaps strangers are even now caring for him."

"Our son is a Christian. We don't know whether this man is a Christian or not. These foreigners aren't Christians at all; they are godless people—Lutherans!"

"Just the same, he is going to stay with us."

"Good gracious! what a man you are!"

"Well, you're not such a bad sort of a woman; but now make him some of your good fever medicine. He needs it."

"He will die on our hands, and then we shan't have a farthing to show for all our trouble."

So the two talked together. They spoke very loudly, and must have thought that I was still unconscious and very ill. Was that really my condition? Was I at the point of death and surrounded by total strangers?

I did not move nor open my eyes, for

I did not want to see the face of the woman who had such a shrill voice, and who had suggested throwing me out into the road to die. Neither did I want to see the man, although he was a kind-hearted fellow, and without doubt the one to whom I owed my life. I did not want to see anything of life. I had constantly another countenance before me—a pale, lovely, infinitely pathetic child's face, with great sorrowful eyes.

Was it possible for one to dream in such a lifelike way? Of course I was ill; I had a high fever, still it was strange that I could dream as I had, even in a fever.

My rescuer and his amiable wife went away. I plainly heard them walking down a wooden stairway. It creaked under their feet. When *her* feet had touched the stairs they had remained silent.

Now that I was alone, I could once more reflect undisturbed. I was no

longer so ill that I could not think of what had happened. The supposition that my room had no door at the side had, then, been correct. I understood, too, that I lay in a strange room, in a strange house, and that people whom I did not know were caring for me. Yesterday—it must have been yesterday—I had ridden out from Rome, had wandered about all day on the Campagna. At nightfall the fever had seized me; I had fallen from my horse, unconscious, near a house outside some one of the city gates; a house belonging to an elderly peasant and his wife, who had a son in a foreign country. But there was a daughter in the house, a daughter——. Or was the daughter only a phantom of my delirium? How could common peasants have such a daughter? It was impossible.

I was no longer dreaming. I fully realized my situation, and could reason clearly. The man had found me unconscious, early in the morning, before his

house, had carried me in, and had kept me there, despite the protests of his heartlessly sordid wife. He had also taken possession of my horse, which had probably not strayed far from its master, and was treating it as his own property. I could picture all this to myself very well, for it all dealt with perfectly ordinary things and events.

I began to remember. I had been at Frascati and at Tusculum on an unbearably close, sultry day. A sirocco had sprung up—I remembered that quite plainly. But then? What then? Once more the thread of my thought broke short off. My mind was swallowed up in a fathomless abyss. But what of the room in which I found myself, with the antique figures on the wall and ceiling; the singular chamber, filled with the mysterious perfume, with the unearthly luster. . . .

I opened my eyes. It was the same room that I had seen in my delirium, and

yet not the same. A faint, cold, gray daylight pervaded it, coming not through a window, but a small chink in the wall. By this prosaic, unsympathetic light the stucco work on the ceiling and the Pompeian frescoes on the walls looked spoiled and faded. I saw that many even were entirely destroyed. It had needed my feverish imagination to make them seem so glorious a manifestation of Hellenic art. Besides, that glorifying, transfiguring radiance was lacking, and also that wonderful perfume.

The sweet maiden had taken light and fragrance with her when she had vanished from me.

I continued to gaze about me. On the floor lay the mat, which I now saw was a coarse affair made of rushes. Beside my bed was the antique chair, now looking very common and ugly. At a little distance was the small round table, at which the lovely child had stood as she examined the lamp. The beautiful silver

vase was gone, and gone were the tear vials, glittering with all their opalescent tints. All this was nothing but a dream, a feverish phantasm !

I was seized with a dull amazement, and at the same time with an ardent longing to lose anew my clearness of mind ; to have the fever again ; to be once more delirious ; once more to have visions, in which I breathed wonderful perfume, beheld heavenly radiance—visions which would once more show me that lovely maiden, that beautiful child !

Then I was interrupted in my meditations by the shrill voice of the mistress of the house, and the sound of clumsy feet ascending the creaking stairs. It was doubtless my host, bringing me his wife's good fever mixture.

Instead of greeting my rescuer, and thanking him for having saved my young life, I let myself sink back upon the bed, and shutting my eyes, pretended to be asleep. I heard the man bend over me,

and then step back quietly ; heard him put something down upon the chair near me, and then go away as quietly as possible. But the stairs creaked.

CHAPTER VII.

Once more I had the raging fever ; once more I lay in wild delirium. Thank God !

Once more the fragrance, the light. Once more she, the mysterious being, the lovely maiden, the sweet child !

This time she seemed less terrified when she realized that I was looking at her, gazing at her, devouring her with my feverish glance. I tried to sit up, and once more stretch out my arms toward her, but she made such a beseeching and frightened gesture with the hand on which the great ruby gleamed like a crystalized drop of blood, that I lay still. She seemed to be satisfied, and glided to the table. The noble silver vase and the glass vials once more stood upon it. She took up one of them and approached my bed.

She stood close by me, bathed in a

cloud of fragrance, and encircled by her delicate garments as by beams of light.

Enthralled by some magic power emanating from her, I lay motionless, scarce daring to breathe, and experiencing a realization of blissful ecstasy beyond the belief of man. Then, with her delicate, slender hand she opened the little vial and held it to my lips. . . .

Starangely enough the tiny, gleaming vessel appeared to contain nothing—at any rate, not a drop ran out of it. But her proximity alone exercised a magic healing power upon me. From that moment I was only conscious of my feverish condition from the fact that I still had the vision of the luster, the fragrance, and of her presence. Indeed I could have immediately arisen and followed my beautiful phantom to the ends of the earth. What would I not have given to have dared to take her hand and hold it in mine! My heart beat furiously when I imagined that some time my lips might

touch her cheeks, her mouth. I was twenty years old, and had never been in love.

Now I was—and how deeply! Heavens! In love with a dream image, a fever phantom, a spirit!

Her presence awed me. With lowered voice, as if in church, I besought her, with all my heart:

“Do not go away to-day so soon! Do not flee, do not vanish from me again to-day! I will lie quite still. I will only look at you . . . only look at you. And if you would let me hear your voice—— Do; O, do! I know that you are no reality, but I will accept you as one. Do you hear that? I will! Speak to me; O, do!”

She sighed softly, but so deeply. Still not a word. Then I cried, passionately, like a spoiled child that is denied his fondest wish: “If you will not speak to me, then go away!” But when she made a slight movement, as if to leave me, I cried anew:

“Stay! Do not speak! Only stay!”

At last she spoke. That is, she moved her lips, as if trying to speak. I hung on her lips, as if I were dying of thirst, and could drink her words. What a little mouth she had, such an innocent, childish mouth! But so wan, so deadly pale!

She commenced to whisper. It sounded like mysterious music. Strange was the tone of her voice. At first I could not understand her at all. I sat up, gazed intently upon her lips, listened, and thought at last that I understood. . . . No; I was only deceiving myself. But when I realized that it was no deception, that I really understood her, I could have almost laughed aloud. Yes; indeed I could almost have laughed aloud, and heartily, too. Just imagine it, picture it to yourself, my vision, my lovely young maiden, was speaking to me in Latin!

It was indeed Latin, that flowed from

her lips as softly as the music of the spheres. There was no doubt about it ; it was beautiful, pure, classic Latin.

Divine Virgil ; and I had always been such a wretched Latin scholar from the First Form up ! She smiled when I answered her—at least, something like the shadow of a smile passed, like a ripple, over her calm and sorrowful features. She might have laughed at my miserable Latin without my being ashamed could I only have once more seen that radiance on her almost rigid features. But she did not laugh, and oddly enough I could not picture her to myself as laughing—at least, my feverish imagination was not capable of doing so.

Now we talked together ; she in her Latin of Cicero and Seneca ; I bungling over the noble language like a second former, and a bad one at that.

“ How does it happen that you speak Latin, and such Latin ? ”

“ It is only natural.”

“ Do you speak Greek, too ? ”

“ Indeed, yes ; my mother was a Grecian.”

“ A Grecian ! The old woman of the Campagna, a Grecian ? ”

“ What ! ”

“ Forgive me ! I forgot entirely that you were only a dream. O, you lovely dream ! ”

“ You must lie still——

“ Quite still. But you must go on speaking.”

——or else I must leave you once more.”

“ No, No ! Will you not give me your hand ? Just your hand ? ”

She made that same gesture of terror. I hastened to reassure her.

“ Do not give it to me, if you do not want to. But why not ? ”

“ You must lie still.”

“ Will you stay with me if I lie very still, and only look at you and listen to your voice ? ”

“ I will stay as long as I can.”

“The whole night—for it seems to be night?”

“It is after midnight.”

“And will you stay till morning?”

“As long as I can stay.”

“But you will come back?” You will come back before the morning is past?”

“As soon as I can come back.”

“Thank you; O, thank you!” Then I was silent, overwhelmed with bliss. She glided about the room, and not a sound was to be heard. Soon I called her back to me:

“You brought the silver vase and these vials with you, did you not?”

“I brought them with me.”

“And the luster—the fragrance? When you go you take with you all the light—all the perfume—all my happiness!”

“I shall come again.”

“You will? Thank God!”

“Whom do you thank?”

“God.”

“The one and Almighty God?”

“Yes.”

She shuddered, as if terrified. I could think of nothing but a white lily shaken by the rude wind. But I had no time to marvel long at that. I wanted to find out much more from her.

“ Whence do you bring all these wonderful things ? ”

“ From my house.”

“ Is that far away ? ”

“ No ; very near.”

“ And do you carry them back there ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ What was in the little vial which you held to my lips ? ”

“ The tears that flowed for me.”

“ The tears ? ”

“ Many flowed for me.”

“ And I was to drink of those tears ? ”

“ They will make you well.”

I wanted to be incredulous, and to tell her that I was dreaming too foolishly, but a new thought occurred to me.

“ Do they allow you to come to me ? ”

“ They allow me to.”

“ Does your mother ? ”

“ I do not ask her. ”

“ To come here at midnight to me ? ”

“ Yes ; my beloved. ”

“ What did you call me ? ”

“ Still ; you must lie quite still ! ”

“ Oh, you, you, you ! ”

Silence. What was the explanation of it all ? Could a man feel what I felt ? Of a sudden I asked her :

“ You have not yet told me your name. It must be as sweet as music. What is it ? ”

“ Amata. ”

“ Amata, darling ! beloved ! ”

“ Lie still ; lie still ! ”

“ Amata, Amata ! ”

I tried to spring up, to—— But she vanished, with a low cry of agony.

“ Amata, Amata ! ”

Deep, dark night. Gone the light ; gone the fragrance ; gone the sweet being. Only the silence of the grave. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Prosaic day came once more, bringing with it the cessation of my fever and the end of my blissful vision. How I longed for the delirium.

My host came stumbling up the creaking wooden stairs. He found me sitting upright in bed, fully conscious, and with almost no fever, and uttered a loud cry of joy at the sight. He also found empty the earthenware mug, which had been full of his wife's fever mixture, and which he had placed beside me.

I did not tell him that I had not consciously drunk a drop of the medicine, though I might have swallowed it in my delirium, while tortured by burning thirst.

It cost me a hard struggle to tear myself away from my mad fancies long enough to thank my host, assuring him at the same time that he would be richly

repaid for saving my life and for his care of me. I did not possess the courage to inquire either concerning the circumstances under which he had found me or how long I had lain in his house. It was as if I wished to remind myself as little as possible of the reality of the affair ; as if I dreaded to find the actuality of my existence all too palpable ; a weakness which I termed cowardice, without being able to conquer it.

My host now told me that his name was Antonia Raffi. That he had a little house outside the gate of San Sebastian, together with a small vegetable garden, from the products of which he and his wife eked out a scanty existence. I also learned that Antonio's son was working as a laborer in either France or Germany. His name was Sandro, and he was just such a beardless young fellow as I. Antonio said that he had kept thinking of his own son all the time that he had been caring for me. His wife, Gigia, so he

informed me, was not a bad woman at heart, though she was often rather rough and ungracious. She had made me her fever medicine of citrons cooked to a pap in red wine, and also strong meat broth, the only nourishment that I had been able to take during all that time. He, Antonio, had gone into the city every morning himself to purchase the meat, out of which to make the broth.

The expression "during all that time" caught my ear. Then I had lain there in that strange room for days——

I inquired what sort of a room it was. O, he said, it was a good, healthy, dry room, though, to be sure, it had no windows. Under it there was a second and larger chamber, and in this lived the man and his wife, together with their hens, two dogs, and several swine that they were fattening for market. My horse was in a shed close by, and was well cared for. The house was said to be several thousand years old, a relic of old

Rome—the Rome over which Nero had once ruled as emperor. At that time the edifice was said to have been not a dwelling place for the living, but for the dead. Yes; the story was that the old house had been a tomb. “But then,” he concluded, “who would believe that? They wouldn’t bury the dead in a room with such a pretty ceiling and such bright colored walls would they?”

Well, well, so I had been lying at the point of death in an old tomb, and had dreamed——

Antonio asked me whether I was afraid to stay in the house after what he had told me. I replied that I was not at all afraid. He looked at me somewhat shamefacedly, and then added that there was nothing to fear in his house, even if it had once been a tomb. Any one who was dead stayed dead, especially any one who had been dead so many, many hundred years. That was so, was it not? There wasn’t a speck of dust left of those

people who had died so many centuries ago, and how, then, could they rise up and terrify the living?

Antonio put this to me with such serious eagerness that I hastened to agree with him, and at the same time positively assured him that I was not afraid of ghosts.

My host seemed to feel greatly relieved in his mind, and went off to inform his wife how wonderfully efficacious her medicine had been, and to assure her that I was "Galant'uomo," and had solemnly promised to pay them well.

Now that the matter of payment had been settled, it occurred to Antonio and his wife that I might be hungry, and they accordingly decided to kill and prepare for me their very fattest pullet.

Antonio had left me in a condition of dull wonder. Everything was a puzzle to me. I was lying in an ancient Roman tomb, and had seen in my feverish imagination a young, entrancing be-

ing, who was dressed after the classical fashion, brought with her antique vials and a vase of spikenard, and who addressed me in Latin. If this were not a strange experience, then there never was one.

Suddenly it occurred to me that my dream image resembled that young wife, whose——

Like a flash the memory of the whole ghastly scene in the inn “ di Mezzavia ” returned to me. I recollected the frightful tragedy down to the slightest details. I saw once more the dull, deathly, sorrowful eyes of the abused young wife; saw her spattered with blood, standing motionless beside the murdered man; gazed after her as she passed with her lover over the desolate, brown Campagna toward the ruined tombs on the Old Apian Way; saw the two figures vanish into the haze of the sirocco. It was her mournful eyes that I had seen in my vision.

My ride was now also perfectly clear in my mind ; the furious flight over the Campagna ; the feverish dread of being seized by the Carabinieri for murder.

I remembered how I had ridden I knew not whither, with bared breast and uncovered head. I must have suffered from a terrible attack of fever, and it was a wonder that I had survived.

I heard the voice of my host down below, instructing his wife to take all possible pains to make a good piece of business out of the rescue and care of the young gentleman. The tone in which Madame Gigia responded to this pleasing communication led me to hope to be immediately strengthened by the broth from "the very fattest pullet." I needed this strength, for I wanted to go away ; to leave in a few hours—just as soon as I felt a little stronger. I would have Antonio get me a carriage from Rome, and then turn away out of the tomb, out into the sunshine—back to life ?

They were now talking less loudly down below, but I could still understand what they said.

“ Why did you tell him that about our house ? ”

“ What was there to tell ? You mean that we live in a tomb ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ He is not afraid.”

“ What about that story ? You know what I mean.”

“ O, no ; I did not tell him that. It is a long time since any one has seen her. She has never appeared to me, nor to you, either. It is all nothing but foolish talk.”

“ Well, she appeared to our son as plain as day, and to my father when he was a young man, and to his father. She bewitches the young men, and never comes to any others. The story is that she drives them mad. My grandfather went crazy over her ; you know that as well as I do. I don't see how you can talk the way you do ! ”

“ Not so loud. He is conscious again.” They continued to talk, but in such low tones that their words were unintelligible to me.

Well, well, well ! My vision was no vision after all—it was a ghost. If I had not been so weak I should have laughed aloud at myself for my sudden full belief in ghosts. How foolish I was ! No doubt the whole conversation only existed in my overwrought imagination.

Let that be as it would, however, I firmly decided to stay one more night, and after that—well, I could see when the time came.



CHAPTER IX

I wished to observe sharply, not only myself, but all that happened around me during this night. My mind was now clear. If it would only remain so !

Before I knew it the fever had returned. My head commenced to ache ; my hands grew burning hot, and my skin dry and parched. I felt my pulse ; it was jerky, and so fast that I could hardly count the beats.

My thoughts began to be confused. I tried with all the power of my will to control them ; to force myself to think logically and clearly ; and to fight against my imagination, but it was all in vain.

“Amata, where are you ? Come to me, beloved ! Amata, Amata !”

For hours I lay there, calling her name in every tone of love, yearning, and anxious expectation.

My fever must have increased, for I

did not notice her coming, although I had planned beforehand to watch carefully how she came, and whether the stairs really did not creak beneath her feet; to watch carefully how the light and fragrance began, and whether she brought the vase and the vials with her; whether she put them on the table immediately, or first came to my bed. I might have spared my plans. Suddenly she was there, sitting by my side, surrounded by the radiance and perfume, and speaking to me.

“ So he has told you, has he? ”

“ Amata, are you really there? ”

“ I know that he has told you. ”

“ Who? ”

“ The old man. ”

“ You mean Antonio? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Told me what? ”

“ About me. ”

I laughed aloud.

“ Yes; just think of it! He thinks

you are a ghost—a pagan ghost. I know that you are a dream, my sweet phantom, my glorious vision! The idea of you being a disagreeable spirit, that can find no rest, and that terrifies the living! Pshaw!”

“Are you not terrified by me?”

“How could I be when I love you unspeakably? It is foolish and unreasonable—— Did you speak?”

She had only sighed, but it sounded as if she were in agony. When I heard that mournful sound uttered by such a childish being, with such lovely features, such deathlike eyes, I was seized with a feeling of compassion, for which, even after so many years, I can find no expression.

This feeling oppressed me, lay like an Alp upon me. I tossed about on my bed, groaning, and crying to myself: “Be still. It is all a dream. How can she suffer, when she is not a reality?”

These assurances helped me not at all,

for my vision sat by my side in the loveliest reality, unspeakably beautiful, hopelessly sad, and from time to time parting her childish lips to utter that low, mournful sigh, which pierced my very heart. At last I cried, in the excess of my pity :

“ Can I not help you ? I would give my life to do it ! Tell me how I can help you ! ”

She asked me :

“ Do you really believe that I am only a dream ? ”

“ Yes ; indeed I do. And I bless my fever for bringing such a vision to me.”
You do not dream ; you really see me.”

“ Oh, no ; for then you must be——”

I could not say it. In a low voice she finished the sentence :

“ A ghost.” And then still lower, after a long pause : “ I am a ghost.”

“ The ghost of whom ? ”

“ That Amata.”

“ Yes ; you are Amata. Your name

is as sweet and lovely as you are yourself."

"When I lived I was a pagan, and prayed to the gods of Greece and Rome."

"When did you live?"

"When Nero was emperor."

"But that was two thousand years ago. Have you found no rest since then?"

"No rest."

"O! Amata, Amata!"

"No rest, no rest!"

"Why? What could you have done to be condemned to find no rest in death? You are so young—only a child."

"No rest, no rest!"

"Dearest, loveliest Amata, tell me why you can find no rest."

So she told me. I repeat her own words. But no words could reproduce her glance; her expression; the tone of her voice; the agonized quivering of her lips; her hopeless sighs. Neither can I describe my sensations, for the apparent reality of my illusion drove me to the verge of madness.

CHAPTER X

In life I was the only child of the noble Roman, Marcus Vinicius, and his wife, Theodora, a Grecian from the ancient city of Leucote. Life then seemed to me the most precious of all the gifts of the gods. I loved it more than anything else in the world. I possessed such unbounded desire for life ; such a joy of existence ; such yearning for the glory of the golden day. All that was gloomy and sad, or that was not beautiful, joyous and pleasant, filled me with terror and aversion. I would have liked, best of all, to have wreathed my brows with sunbeams.

My father was a high official in the palace of the Emperor Nero, who was not only lord of the world, but a god of heaven, greater than Jupiter. He lived in a vast golden house. Roses and spike-nard dropped incessantly from its ceil-

ings ; sweet music filled its endless halls ; whole nations of marble statues decorated those halls ; beautiful men and women animated them. Nero set fire to Rome that he might build this house. All Rome must perforce go up in flames, that from the ashes Cæsar's golden palace might arise, an elysium upon earth.

From Tusculum I watched those flames, which seemed to enwrap the whole world, mounting to the heavens, as if to consume even the dwelling places of the gods. For the god of Rome willed to be greater than they.

At Tusculum my father possessed a noble estate, where I was born and grew up. I was beautiful, but my parents tried to keep the beauty of their only child as much a secret as possible, for if Cæsar had heard that his Marcus Vini-
cius had a beautiful daughter, I should have become the emperor's prey.

How happy I was ! To merely breathe was bliss ! Ah, to breathe first amid beauty and splendor, and then——

My parents' villa on the hill of Tusculum lay high up over the plain, between the famous estates of Lucullus and Cicero. From the bright-colored portico of our house the rose gardens stretched away on every side. Beyond these were fields planted with red, white, and yellow lilies. There were meadows blue with violets, and crossed by brooks, on whose banks narcissus and hyacinth bloomed. There were shady myrtle groves, in which strayed gazelles; and pleasant, cool grottos, filled with the sound of plashing water, which offered refreshment to all who sought. Such was my home.

White temples lifted up their heads amid the blooming fields; gleaming statues of the gods, and altars upon steps of bronze and shining marble, stood in the dark groves. But my parents sacrificed to the gods against their will, only seeming to do them reverence, for they only served the glorious, beautiful Olympians for fear of the emperor's spies.

My parents were disciples of that new faith, which had been brought from Galilee to Rome. A dark, repellant faith it was. One that turned away from all that was bright and pleasant, and was the deadly enemy of beauty ; that taught of a God, who had died, like a condemned slave, upon the cross. It was a faith that considered beautiful, exquisite life to be the greatest evil, and terrible death the only blessing.

I was instructed in this faith by a Jewish freedman of my father's, Maura by name. My spirit, however, did not embrace the new belief, but recoiled from it in terror. My soul was seized with horror and aversion. My youth, my desire for life, my longing for the sunlight, for laughter and pleasure, all irresistibly yearned for the old gods, whom I was commanded to deny and hate.

It was only with my heart full of inward opposition, and through fear of my parents, that I served the new God for

appearance sake. In secret I wreathed the gleaming marble statues of my gods, and prayed to them to protect me from the God of terror.

As I said, my father's estate joined the lands which had formerly belonged to Lucius Lucullus, whose poetry I had known and loved from my earliest childhood. Now, the broad lands, which extended from high Tusculum to the outskirts of Rome, belonged, by the grace of the emperor, to one of his freedmen, the terrible Tigellinus. His name was only mentioned in whispers, and with pale faces, in my father's house; for he was more terrible than Cæsar—the divinity of that divinity. He was a deadly enemy of my father, who was loved by the emperor, and also admired by the whole Roman people for the pureness of his life. Even Tigellinus could not harm him.

There was on our estate a marble statue of Venus, who, my maidens whispered,

was, of all the gods, not only the most gloriously beautiful, but the mightiest. To me this statue was the most beautiful thing in the world—more beautiful than the loveliest music, than the most glorious garden of roses, or the crimson sunset above the blue waves of the Mediterranean. If I had been asked to tell who was most mighty and most lovely upon earth, I should have spoken the name of the great goddess—thy name, O, Aphrodite !

Once her statue had stood near our house, enthroned in a temple in the midst of a broad field of roses ; for these flowers were sacred to the goddess above all others. When my parents forsook the old gods, and swore allegiance to that single and Almighty God, my mother wished to have the statue of Aphrodite destroyed, although it was from the chisel of a Greek artist. But my father kept the beautiful image, and would not have it broken in pieces. It was secretly carried to a hid-

den grotto at the very end of the great garden, where people seldom went. Wild roses grew over the entrance, and hung in long festoons from the rocky walls. The interior of the cave was thickly overgrown with delicate ferns. One day, when I was wandering about in that part of the garden with my maidens, we discovered the grotto—the hiding place of so much beauty. I saw a pair of turtle doves flutter through the foliage, and crept after them, hunting for the nest of the lovely birds. Out of the gray twilight a lofty form gleamed down upon me. At first I fled, but soon returned, bravely accompanied by the maidens. Then we recognized the statue.

We anxiously kept our secret, often returning to the grotto, which had become a temple. We would part the fragrant curtain, creep, trembling, into the sanctuary, and, kneeling at the feet of the goddess, would admire her beauty, and whisper of the miracles that she was

said to have performed. We did not want to believe that she was not a goddess, and we lamented that we did not dare to pray, nor bring any sacrifices to her.

I, however, prayed to her in secret, and brought her offerings. Whenever I was able to slip away from the train, which my parents had commanded to always remain with me, I would steal to my goddess ; strew before her the loveliest roses from our garden ; feed the doves that nested in the grotto, and beseech her to perform for me one of her miracles, of which I had heard tell. And she answered my prayer.

One day, I still held in my hand the basket full of roses which I had just brought to her, when the leafy curtain was torn aside and in rushed a beautiful youth, whom I had never seen before. He shouted joyfully, as if he had been chasing a dove, and had just captured her. He had captured her.

We stood looking at each other, but did not move. Of a sudden the basket of roses slipped from my hands. I uttered a low cry, and stooped to pick them up. In a moment he had thrown his arms around me, and kissed me on the mouth.

CHAPTER XI

The beautiful spirit told me no more on this night. When the cool, pale morning light entered the room, the radiance of her lamp faded and died out ; the odor of the spikenard flew away ; she herself melted like a dream picture. And a dream picture I considered her, in spite of everything, when I was awake, free from the fever, and reflected upon the visions of the past night. The most wonderful thing of all to me was that I should have the same dream upon a succession of nights, and that even the most impossible things arose from some source in my own confused intellect. The longer I pondered over these things the nearer I felt that I was going mad.

The next night the same thing happened. The anxious waiting ; the passionate agitation, followed by the fast rising fever ; then the confusion ; the de-

lirium ; the vision. She was there once more, sitting beside my bed, the ruby sparkling on her white hand, her pale lips moving. She continued her story—

He gave me a gold ring, with a blood-red stone, and pledged himself to me, at the foot of the statue of the great goddess. She looked down upon us, and heard his oath and mine—smiling, she looked down upon us !

Rufus was his name, and he was the son of that mighty and terrible man, Tigellinus.

Goddess ! Thou great goddess, gleaming with splendor and beauty, how couldest thou look down and smile upon us ?

Rufus went to his father, and begged him to ask Vinicius to give his daughter in marriage to him.

I ought to have trembled, but instead I was filled with rapture. Terror ought to have chilled my soul, but all my being was filled with vain and empty joy. How

I loved life ! How I loved my lover !—
his smile, his glance, his kiss !

In my love and my joy of existence,
my soul turned more and more away from
the terrible new God back to the beautiful
forms of the old gods, and towards
the highest of them all, who had smiled
upon our troth.

Tigellinus, who knew only how to
hate and destroy, yet loved his son as a
good man loves the gods. So when he
was besought by his son, with uplifted
hands, to ask the daughter of Marcus
Vinicius for him, the terrible man's hate
for my father melted, and, out of love for
his son, he humbled himself before his
neighbor, entered his house, and asked
me for his son. But my father repulsed
Cæsar's Cæsar, repulsed the mightiest
on earth, drove him from his house with
contempt !

I was not treated harshly, but with
compassion. But I did not want the
pity of my parents. I wanted life, love,

happiness. I wanted my lover, his smile, his glance, his kiss !

In the meantime my parents prepared for the revenge of Tigellinus. It did not tarry long, and was even more terrible than they had anticipated.

The Emperor, Nero, was informed that Marcus Vinicius had a young and beautiful daughter. Accordingly he sent word to my father that he wished to see this daughter at one of his banquets. Those banquets, which were the grandest in the world, and the most infamous.

My father informed the Emperor that he did not wish to send his daughter to the banquet. Then he bade farewell to life, deciding to kill himself before the Emperor could put him to death. But he did not wish to die alone. His wife and daughter, whom otherwise he would leave unprotected, were to die with him. I was to die—I, who longed to live ; to love and to be loved ; to make happy and to be made happy in the glorious sunshine !

We were to drink the hemlock ; I first, then my mother, and last, my father, after he had seen us die. But I resisted, for I did not want to die. I wanted to live, live, live ! Because of my refusal to drink the poison, the Emperor's servants broke into our house before my father could carry out his plan. They seized and dragged us to Rome. There I was separated from my parents.

Now the Emperor saw me ; now, at last, I might have lived, and reveled in life and all its pleasures, for I pleased the Emperor.

Then I caught the gleam of the blood-red stone—this stone—and I said to Cæsar that I—I was a Christian. A Christian could not be the mistress of a sun god, and so I was condemned to death.

I deserved to die, for when I stood before the Emperor, when his eyes found me beautiful, when the god smiled upon me, and I was favored above all those about him, as if I had also been a di-

vinity—then my head was turned. I saw destruction fading away in the distance ; I saw life shining brighter than ever in front, and I bowed my head beneath the eager glance of the Emperor, as if the greatest of the goddesses were smiling upon me. But only for a moment. Once more my eyes fell upon the ruby, and it whispered in my heart, “ Rufus,” and then I cried : “ Cæsar, the daughter of Marcus Vinicius is a Christian ! ”

My noble father blessed me. My proud mother almost kissed my hands when we were once more united—united to die ; to suffer martyrdom for Christ’s sake, as my parents called it, with joy and exultation. For they, also, had openly devoted themselves to the God on the Cross, of whom my soul knew nothing—from whom it recoiled in terror, and for whom I was now to die.

My parents and I were to be torn to pieces by the wild beasts in the arena.

The thing that raised my parents’ ex-

ultation to the highest point was, that on the day of their martyrdom, a man was to be crucified, who was a great bishop of the new faith, Peter by name.

Was I to die? No, I should live! Rufus would not let me perish. Rufus would snatch me from the lions and tigers! Rufus would carry me in his arms back into life, into the sunshine, where the roses bloomed, the birds sang, the great goddess smiled upon the happy!

Rufus, Rufus, Rufus! I thought of nothing else.

The day came on which we, with a great band of other Christians, were condemned to be martyred. With heads erect and shining eyes, holy men and women—among them my parents—went through the ranks of the condemned, praising God and exhorting those of less courage to think of the glory of their martyrdom. When they came to me I did not understand their words; I only realized that I could not die; that I must

live and be happy, united with my beloved.

Not one out of the many seemed to doubt; only a few lamented and trembled; all the rest praised their God with bright eyes and a smile of rapture upon their mouth.

My eyes also shone; I also smiled, for I was thinking of the statue of the great goddess, and that I should live even if the whole world were strewn with corpses.

The night before our death we were taken from the Capitoline prison, into which we had been thrown, and led away to be near at hand when the time came for us to die.

They had put a white garment upon me, and placed a black veil over my head. So I walked thither with all the rest, constantly thinking: "He will come; he must come! He will free you; he will save you! You shall live in the sunshine, and pick with him the

roses of heavenly happiness. But Rufus did not come."

The people stood closely packed along the streets through which we passed. They howled at us, they cursed us. The emperor's soldiers had to protect us with their weapons, or else the Roman populace would have done what the wild beasts were to do—tear us limb from limb.

They had separated me from my parents, and I walked with two other maidens. They began to sing. It had a grewsome sound in my ears. I walked on, feeling nothing of life but my yearning for it.

Rufus, Rufus, Rufus!

We arrived just at daybreak. What a glorious morning it was! The Janiculum hill, on which was the Emperor's rose garden, shone from afar like a pale purple cloud, like the wave, from which sprung the great foam-born goddess, thou, O Aphrodite!

Then I heard the roaring of the wild beasts. They were hungry.

We were collected in the cells underneath the circus. All about us in cages were the wild beasts roaring with hunger ; above us were the Roman people in the arena, roaring with the lust for our blood, our bleeding limbs, our death agonies. Then the floor of our cells rose, and we soared up out of the gloomy depths, the vaulted roof above opening to let us through. I saw the sun just rising over the summit of Tusculum. I gazed at its glory ; my eyes devoured its splendor, till they were almost blinded. I wanted to cry for joy : " Life, life, life ! "

But the Roman people thundered : " Death, death, death ! " Then all was still.

The sun rose higher and higher. A shrill cry burst from the whole multitude. The wild animals were being softly raised in their cages. The gratings were being opened.

- Then came the sound of a chant a hundred voices strong, so solemn, so resounding, that it drowned the roars of the Romans and the howls of the beasts. The Christians were singing in the face of death.

Now I was to die ; was to be torn limb from limb. But my blinded eyes did not see the ghastly death ; they were gazing at the glory of the sun.

“Amata !”

It was his voice. I recognized it above the deathsong of the Christians ; above the roaring of the Romans ; above the howling of the beasts. From far above it came down to me, like a voice from the sky, from the sun.

I looked up. Alas, I could not see him among all those thousands.

“Amata ! The lions ! Amata !”

Nor did I see the lions, although they must have been very near to me, for I heard their snorting, and the lashing of their tails upon the sand of the arena.

A rose fell at my feet. A blood-red rose, such as I had so often brought to the great goddess, to thee, O Aphrodite!

I saw nothing but a red rose, that my beloved had thrown to me as a last greeting.

And then it was I cried out :

“ Let me live ! Great gods, let me live ! Great gods, show yourselves mightier than that bloody God upon the cross ! See, I hate him, I curse him ! Let me live ! ”

And a voice answered me :

“ Thou shalt be cursed, cursed in death, cursed until compassion and pity free thee from my curse ! Not until then, shall the God whom thou blasphemest, have mercy upon thee ! ”

It was my mother's voice.

Then I heard the snorting of the lions close by my ear ; felt their hot breath upon my neck. I sank beneath their paws, and then—

The ghost of the miserable child uttered a shriek, that will ring in my ears to my dying day.

CHAPTER XII

With that never-to-be-forgotten cry piercing my soul, I awoke to find my face wet with tears—

I had wept bitterly in a dream over a picture of my feverish imagination ; wept for deep compassion ; for heart-rending pity, and with the ardent desire of rescuing that lovely being from her horrible death ; a being who only existed in my own disordered brain.

As if my strange outbreak of tears had washed away the last trace of my disease, the fever did not return. My strength increased from hour to hour. I might easily have returned to Rome and left my host, who was now almost too zealous in his attentions. But instead, I remained first one, and then a second night longer in the tomb. But I was not delirious again and did not see her whose name in life had been Amata, and

for whose tragic fate I had wept such bitter tears.

It was in vain that I tried to draw from Antonio any information about the ghost. He carefully avoided every topic that had the least reference to it. All that I could get out of him was that people said that his house had been a grave, but that he himself did not believe that, for his house stood upon the earth and graves were always underneath—and that was all there was to it.

Before taking leave of Antonio and his wife I made a careful search through the house, although I was not in a condition to undergo much exertion. I found nothing of any great significance; it was an ancient tomb, of two stories, the upper of which had apparently been built at a later date. The marble work about it must have been very costly, but with the exception of a few meagre remnants, which did not bear any sign of an inscription, it had all been destroyed. I

thought that very likely some of the broken fragments, bearing the names of those buried in the tomb, might be found by digging up the ground about the building. Judging by its design, the structure must have been of the period of the first emperor, and its builder a wealthy man, for the building was fit to hold a freedman of Nero, even a Tigellinus.

I also learned before my departure that I had been almost three weeks in the tomb.

I naturally entertained the firm determination of returning after I had completely recovered, not only to thank once more the people to whom I owed my life, but also to make further investigations and inquiries. But the strict orders of my physician forbade me to return. He termed my recovery a miracle, in thankfulness for which, had I been a good Catholic, I would have made a barefoot pilgrimage to Loretto. He also

informed me that I had suffered from a most virulent attack of malarial fever, and that my recovery without quinine and only with the help of an old woman's remedy was not only due to a miracle, but also to a tremendously strong constitution. On the whole, I think he was right.

Needless to say I was careful not to tell anyone about my foolish visions, for I had no desire of being laughed at. Besides, I was still in love with the phantom of my feverish imagination ; still felt the deepest pity for my dream-maiden. Some germ of madness must have still been lingering in my brain.

Just a week after my return from the tomb my physician sent me off to Germany, saying that only a complete change of air would complete my recovery.

Before I left I made some inquiries about the murder in the inn "Mezzavia," on the New Appian Way. That had

been no illusion, even if it had been the cause of those from which I suffered in my fever. The landlord had been stabbed to death, and the murderer had fled with the wife of his victim. The *Messaggero* had printed a series of sensational articles on the bloody deed. The police had sought zealously for the fugitives, but had not found a trace of them, and had now given up hope. So my mind was set at rest upon that point. I left Rome without informing anyone that I had been a witness of the ghastly tragedy.

* * * * *

Years had passed. For a long time the murder in the tavern on the New Appian Way and my severe illness and wonderful recovery had been merely like some old, half-forgotten dream. Sometimes I still thought of the visions which I had had in that long dream, but only with a sort of wonder that a man could dream with such vividness and semblance of reality.

I lived in the villa Falconieri at Frascati, at peace with all the world, and only hoping to be allowed to enjoy my pleasant home for as many more years of life as possible. One day I received a visit from an old acquaintance. He was an archæologist, living in Rome, who often used to come out to my villa of a Saturday, after a hard week's work, to rest over Sunday, and to give me pleasure by his flow of spirits and interesting conversation. This time he informed me, immediately upon his arrival, that he must leave again the next morning.

"You must come with me," he said. "I am not going back to Rome by the railroad, but by carriage through the Campagna. We will start bright and early, so that by evening you may be able to stroll about again under your beloved oak trees. During the day I will guarantee to show you something interesting."

"What might that be?"

“ A newly discovered Christian catacomb.”

“ Did you discover it ?”

“ Yes, and guess where ?”

“ Well, most of the Campagna is a Christian graveyard.”

“ Just think of it, though ; underneath an ancient tomb. The entrance to the catacomb is straight down from the first floor of the tomb.”

“ That is strange.”

“ Is it not ? And the matter is made still more interesting on account of the character of the man, who erected over the catacomb a magnificent tomb for himself and his family. Not, however, for all of his family. A son was a Christian and died a martyr's death under Nero, after he had built the catacomb, probably with the knowledge and consent of his father, who was the most terrible man of his time.”

“ Do you know his name ? ”

“ Tigellinus.”

“ Nero’s freedman ? ”

“ The very same. ”

“ You say that Tigellinus allowed his tomb to be built over a Christian catacomb, laid out by his son ? ”

“ I found in the catacomb the grave of the son of Tigellinus. The inscription named him as the founder. ”

I cried aloud : “ “ Rufus laid out a Christian catacomb ? ” ”

“ Rufus was the youth’s name. He died in his twentieth year. How did you know that the son of Tigellinus was named Rufus ? ”

I did not answer. I knew that the name of the son of Tigellinus was Rufus, but no one had told me. I had dreamed it long years before. Suddenly it occurred to me who had spoken the name in my dream, with such a low, sweet voice. I could not utter a word. My guest asked :

“ You will go with me, won’t you ? ”

“ To the grave of the young Rufus ? ”

I spoke mechanically, with difficulty, as if absent minded.

"I will show it to you. It was the first grave that we found. To-morrow we intend to open another grave."

I murmured, with great agitation :

"Yes; of course, another grave, close beside that of Rufus, who died under Nero. I suppose he was also torn to pieces by wild beasts."

"Very probably. The fact that Tigellinus allowed his mausoleum to be erected upon the Christian grave of his son throws an interesting side light upon the character of that terrible man."

"He loved his son as a good man loves the gods. His son was the only creature on earth that the wretch cared for."

The archæologist laughed.

"There you are in the clouds again. By next week your new novel, entitled 'Rufus, the Son of Tigellinus,' will be complete."

"Laugh away; I don't care. Where is the mausoleum?"

“ Between the Old and the New Apian Way.”

“ In the center of a little cultivated patch of land ? ”

“ Yes ; you seem to know the place.”

“ Do you know the name of the owner of the land ? ”

“ No.”

“ He must be an old man by this time.”

“ O, no ; quite a young couple live there.”

“ Then I don't know the place after all. But you say that the people live in the tomb ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Is it a round tomb, with two vaults, the upper one of later date, and with beautiful stucco work on the ceiling, and Pompeian paintings on the wall, representing Bacchus and his train ? ”

“ Yes ; that is the one.”

CHAPTER XIII

It was, without doubt, my tomb, in which, as a young man, I had struggled with death, and dreamed such wonderful dreams.

“ Rufus, Rufus, Rufus ! ”

So she had cried, with her low, sweet voice ; she, my vision, my Amata, whom I had so loved, and for whom I had wept tears of such unutterable pity.

Her voice had been sweet as the song of birds, when she had called the name of the beloved youth : “ Rufus, Rufus, Rufus ! ”

And the grave of this Rufus had been found ; found under the vault in which I had dreamed of the name. The grave in which lay buried the son of Tigellinus, who had died a Christian martyr under Nero.

Was not that the strangest sort of a coincidence—for it must have been a co-

incidence? There were plenty of instances where just such coincidences have occurred; I was merely experiencing one of them myself—that was all.

I said nothing of what was passing in my mind, but I could scarcely conceal my excitement and agitation. That night I never closed my eyes. Once more, for the thousandth time, attempted to recall all the details of that strange experience; anxiously sought to grasp the intangible; to comprehend the incomprehensible; to give reasons; to make explanations. I might as well have tried to draw water in a sieve.

We started early the next morning, going by way of Marino, down to the New Appian Way, past the inn “Mezzavia,” and then past the ugly race course of the modern Romans—the Campanelle on the road which unites the Old and New Appian Way. I was so taciturn that my companion anxiously inquired for my health. To give him some ex-

planation of my extraordinary behavior I related my adventure in the inn, and the bloody deed of which I had been a witness, adding that the recollection had agitated me greatly.

Then suddenly I saw an ancient ruin not far from the grove of Egeria, in the midst of a field of artichokes, and cried out :

“ There is the tomb of Tigellinus ! ”

“ Ha, I thought that you knew it. ”

Our carriage stopped, and the coachman was told to drive to the Gate of San Sebastian and put up his horses, and to return for us an hour before sunset, for I wished to be back at Frascati that same evening.

The arrival of the professor was being anxiously awaited by several young German and Roman students, whom he had invited to examine with him the land adjacent to the tomb. I begged them to start at once and not concern themselves about me, as I would join them in

a few moments. When I had thus escaped from the others, I decided to have a talk with the people who now inhabited the tomb, and also to look at the room in which I had lain near death for almost three weeks. Upon speaking with the owner I learned that Antonio was dead, and that it was his son to whom I was speaking, and who now, together with his wife and child, lived in the mausoleum of Tigellinus. Concerning the investigation which was in progress on their land, the man expressed himself in a resigned and reasonable fashion, but the woman began a loud lamentation. Such a lot of gentlemen as had crowded into her house! Why, she even had to move out of her room, because they had dug away all the floor! Probably they were going to dig up all the vegetable garden too, and then she would like to know what was to become of them. Of course, they said that the government would buy all the property and pay them well for it,

and that they would be made Signori all in a moment ; but she didn't believe it. Who could believe such a story as that ? It was a misfortune that the first gentleman had ever come and looked at the house, and had discovered the little opening in the stone floor of the lower room. Her husband, who had been born in the house, remembered the hole from his childhood ; but who would have thought that an entire churchyard lay under their house and garden, and that such things would come to light through that little hole ?

I tried to soothe the excited woman, and then turned to the man begging him to lead me into the house. The lower room was now merely a pit leading down into the bowels of the earth. Out of the freshly piled heaps of dirt the narrow wooden stairway rose, leading to the upper room in which the couple were now forced to live, while the children together with the maid, hens, dogs, and swine

were housed in a shed close by. I told the man not to bother to follow me up stairs as I would be down in a moment.

How the stairs creaked under my feet ! The steps groaned and moaned unmistakably. Then I once more beheld the pale decorations on the ceiling and pictures on the walls. Those pictures so full of beauty and the joy of existence, and yet on the walls of a tomb ! There was the old chair in which her delicate form had rested ; there too, the little round table upon which her lamp had burned and the silver vase had stood, upon which the vials had lain—those vials filled with the tears that Rufus had wept over his martyred darling.

When I came down again Antonio said to me :

“ A countryman of yours once lay near to death in that upper room. My father found him senseless, carried him into the house and nursed him until he recovered.”

In my present mood I could not bear to make myself known, and I only said :

“ I have heard of that. Also of a ghost that visited the sick man night after night. I suppose, though, that it is only an idle tale.”

He answered me with solemn earnestness : “ It is true, sir.”

“ You believe in the ghost then ? ”

“ Sir, I have seen it myself.”

“ The ghost ? ”

“ Yes, when I was a very young man.”

“ What did it look like ? ”

“ It was as beautiful as the Madonna.”

“ So it was a woman ? ”

“ Hardly more than a child, sir.”

“ Did it wear a white garment, and a black veil on its head ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Did it speak to you ? ”

“ In spite of its beauty I was terrified, and called upon the saints to protect me. Then it uttered a long deep sigh and vanished, and I never saw it again.”

“ So you had pity on it ? ”

“ Pity on a pagan ghost ? ”

“ And does the ghost still appear ? ”

“ No, not for a long time.”

“ That is strange.”

“ My father told me that since your countryman was saved from death in our house it was never seen again. Your countryman must have driven it away.”

“ Then the poor spirit has at last found rest ! ”

“ Perhaps, sir.”

Perhaps

At this moment the head of the archæologist appeared at the mouth of the pit, at the edge of which we were standing. He called to me :

“ We are waiting for you to open a new grave.”

“ The grave close beside that of young Rufus ? ”

“ Yes, close beside, but come along.”

One instant I hesitated, then I de-

scended into the hole which opened into one of those low, narrow galleries common in the Christian catacombs. My friend led the way with a lighted candle in his hand.

“ We reached a vault with arched roof higher than the passageway. Here there were two graves. One had already been opened. It contained only a greyish heap of dust. A small marble tablet lay on the floor. The archæologist read the inscription : “ The grave of Rufus, son of Tigellinus, and builder of this catacomb.”

Just then two laborers opened the grave which was close by.

We found in this second grave neither bones nor ashes. It contained only the following articles ;—a beautiful silver vase, a little clay lamp, several tear vials, and a golden ring set with a great ruby.

There was a tablet upon the second grave also. It was of wonderfully beau-

tiful yellow marble, and upon it was inscribed a single word, a name, a woman's name,

“Amata”

